

Fountain in the Park c.1900

Sabbath concerns and foul ***murder***

Middlesbrough's Albert Park has just marked the 150th anniversary of its opening. Here University of Huddersfield historian Dr Tosh Warwick explores the story of the park's early decades.

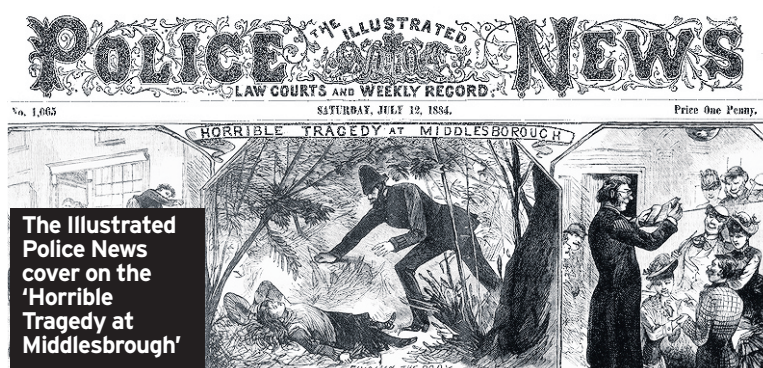
NAMED after the late Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, the town's first public park was the gift of ironmaster and first mayor of Middlesbrough Henry Bolckow as a means of providing open, green space in the Victorian 'Ironopolis'.

The development of parks in the expanding and new urban centres of Britain was driven by major business and civic benefactors and became an integral part of everyday life.

The motivation for developing these new 'lungs of city' were numerous.

The new parks were seen as spaces for 'rational recreation' that would encourage respectable behaviour and afforded opportunities for leisure in fresh air for all the family away from the smog of industry and the moral degeneration and ills of plentiful pubs and gambling.

A more cynical or sceptical explanation for these new green space is that of 'social control', with these regulated spaces allowing the business owners and local authorities (very often the same people) to



keep an eye on the behaviour of the workforce beyond the factory, foundry and furnace.

The official royal opening of the Park by Prince Arthur of Connaught helped propel Middlesbrough and its achievements into the national spotlight.

The event was chronicled in detail both in the local newspapers and in the national press. Having retired to Henry Bolckow's Marton Hall the previous day, Prince Albert's presence helped draw crowds in the town, with The Illustrated London News reporting that 'the streets were thronged with spectators, who greeted the Prince

with hearty enthusiasm'.

The formalities of the ceremony included the ironmaster delivering an address and His Royal Highness responded, followed by prayers offered by the Archbishop of York before the Prince declared the park open for use by the people of Middlesbrough.

After planting a commemorative tree, the party then 'partook of luncheon in a tent in the park' to use the words of Middlesbrough historian and librarian William Lillie, followed by a banquet at the Exchange Hall and banquet at Bolckow's abode, with the Archbishop of York declaring that the manufac-

turer had 'given to this town one of the most magnificent gifts ever offered by man'.

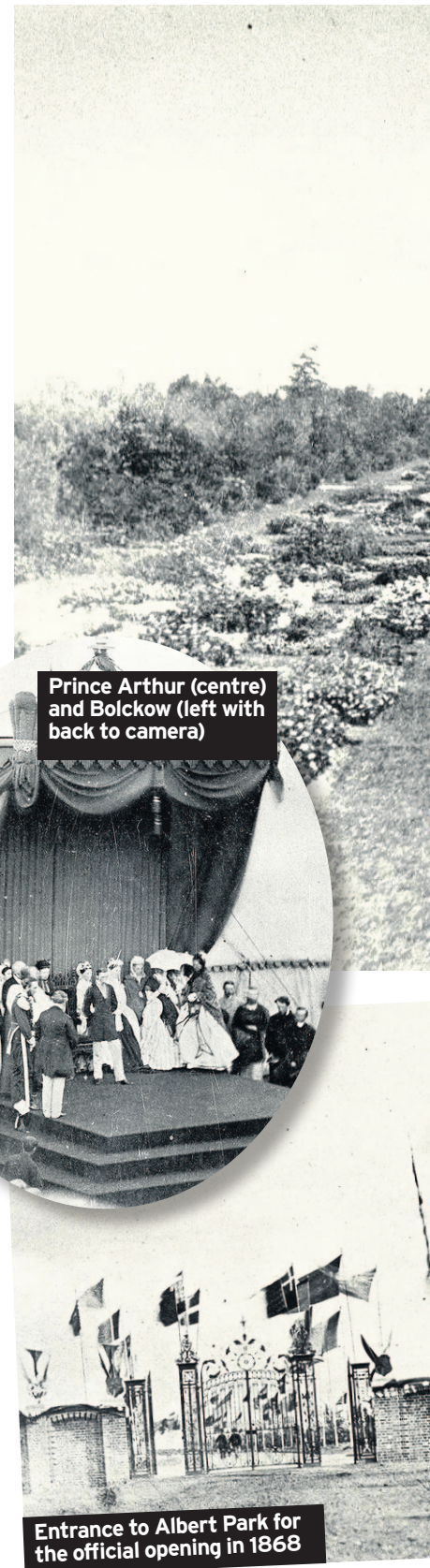
The park went on to play an important part in the lives of Middlesbrough's Victorian citizens. The park's archery ground would become the early home of Middlesbrough Football Club before the club moved to Longlands and Linthorpe Road before settling at Ayresome Park in 1903.

Albert Park also provided a vital space for leisure.

Yet, the ideals of parading along the shrubbery lined paths, playing bowls or cricket or simply relaxing away from the troubles of the industrial town were often far from the reality of the park's early decades.

Musical festivities provoked outrage amongst some of the town's citizens, as was the case with musical performances in the park's early years.

Under the direction of Franz Groenings, a band was playing in Middlesbrough in 1870 to much acclaim, with The Evening Gazette hailing the 'very successful programme', with music enjoyed by several thousands of people attending the Thursday evening summer



Prince Arthur (centre) and Bolckow (left with back to camera)

Entrance to Albert Park for the official opening in 1868

performances which 'enhance the already strong attractions of the park'.

In April 1871 the Evening Gazette reported discontent and divide over the form this should take, particularly on the issue of performances on the Sabbath, noting 'the question of having music in the Albert Park on Sundays is causing considerable discussion'.

The debate found its way into the pages of the local press after the Mayor of Middlesbrough, industrialist Raylton Dixon, shared the letter he had received from cricketer and public house proprietor George Lynas.

The former Yorkshire tailender was strongly against the proposal stating that 'as a Wesleyan Methodist, I wish most emphatically to express my opposition and hostility to that proposal, feeling convinced that should it be carried into effect, its influence would be most disas-